

THE BOOK PAGE

SOVIET STATISTICS

SUMMARY OF THE FULFILMENT OF THE FIRST FIVE-YEAR PLAN FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NATIONAL ECONOMY OF THE U.S.S.R. Report of the State Planning Commission of the Council of People's Commissars of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. State Planning Commission of the U.S.S.R., Moscow, Allen & Unwin, London, Cloth 7/6, Paper 5/-.

This review by Lord Marley will be read with interest but it does not express the opinions of this journal.

There is in China at the present time considerable discussion of what is known as "planned national economy." The National Government is said to be establishing a National Economy Council at Nanking, whose task will be to study the economic position of China, and the best means of increasing industrial and agricultural production. Somewhat similar conditions existed in Russia immediately after the war, and a study of the methods employed and the successes achieved in that country might well be of decisive importance in China. For this reason the appearance of the U.S.S.R. official account of the fulfilment of the First Five-Year Plan is of very great interest. The volume is rightly termed a "summary," but contains a wealth of information upon so many aspects of national life in the Soviet Union that it should prove of real interest to a wide circle of ordinary readers who seek information on this thorny and much disputed subject. For these readers let me say that the volume under review is well got up, excellently printed on good paper, and written in a readable and not too technical manner. There is a general summary of the "planned guidance of the whole economy of the country," due to the concentration of the key economic positions in the hands of the State, "as compared with the characteristic features of capitalism, anarchy and competition, which have become particularly acute in the period of Imperialism." This summary is followed by chapters on industry, agriculture, transport, living conditions, finance, and education. Finally there is a most interesting study of the method of division of labour applied to a vast area such as the Soviet Union. The aim is to secure that factories are placed near to sources of raw materials, and related to the supply of power, the whole problem being studied with a view to meet the needs of the vast population in the cheapest and most efficient manner.

There is, of course, much statistical matter in this account of progress, and it is often suggested that Russian Government statistics are inaccurate, or are deliberately falsified so as to give a more favourable picture than the facts justify. It is said that statistics can be made to prove anything. Certainly no statistics are completely accurate, and in a country so vast and undeveloped as the U.S.S.R. it would be rash to claim that there are no errors. Nevertheless it is worth recording that Tsarist Russia led the world in statistical theory. Since the present régime this theory has been developed, improved and for the first time made full use of as the actual basis upon which the whole

economic planning of the U.S.S.R. is built up. In consequence the accuracy of statistics has become of far greater importance in Russia than in any other country: it can hardly be asserted that the Government would have two different sets of statistics, one for home use and one to delude the foreigner. Probably, taking into account the extent of the Soviet Union and the difficulties of communication, Soviet statistics may be considered remarkably reliable. The present writer had an opportunity of examining the returns upon which these statistics are built up, and after a full discussion with (Prince) Obolensky Ossinsky, head of the Government statistical department, he does not consider that the figures can reasonably be assailed.

The basic intention of the Five-Year Plan was to build up an industry capable of supplying consumption goods, so as to raise the whole standard of life of the workers and peasants. It meant the sacrifice of certain comforts for a few years in order that exports might be increased to pay for imports of machinery to equip the production factories. Much else was of course included, and the whole story of this development is fascinating, including as it does a frank description of the failures as well as the successes. For example, the lag in the increase of productivity of labour is admitted and explained. The huge task set to the railways, not only in building new lines (the mileage increased from 58,000 kilometres in 1913 to 83,000 kilometres in 1932), but in strengthening the roads and bridges, doubling and trebling tracks, installing block signalling and building new locomotives and rolling stock, is described in one of the most interesting chapters. Newspaper men will read with envy of the increase in circulation of Soviet newspapers, from 8 million copies in 1928 to 35 million copies in 1932. Russian newspapers are now published in eighty-eight languages. Coal is among those productive industries which failed to reach the planned figures. Electrification far surpassed the plan, and it is not infrequent, even in remote parts of the Union, to find electric power for irrigation and electric light in villages far distant from any railway but served by overhead cable lines.

The general reader will, however, turn first to an account of living conditions in Russia, and the chapter headed "Labour and Living Conditions," when studied in conjunction with the tables at the end of the volume, together give a fair idea of the position, particularly in comparison with Great Britain, Germany, and the United States. The population of the U.S.S.R. was 154 million in 1929, and is increasing at a rate of over three million a year. This year it is 166 million. During the same period the number of workers has more than doubled (from 11 million to 23 million) and unemployment has been entirely eliminated. There is an interesting account of the means by which the worker acquires a new attitude to labour, regarding it as a matter of honour by his example to educate and awaken the enthusiasm of other more backward workers. The

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IN RUSSIA NOW

The Soviet balloon, U.S.S.R., has deftly put on record a fine feat which should supplement Professor August Picard's work in adding to the world's knowledge of happenings on the other side of the airman's ceiling. Roughly stated, the Russian scientists reached a height three times that of Mount Everest. The physical endurance during the comparatively short ascent was great. Amazingly it is recorded that, inside the car of the balloon, one of the discomforts was heat—the temperature being actually 98 degrees higher than the readings outside. The Soviet Government is to be congratulated on this notable feat which, naturally, formed the theme of enthusiastic political speeches by exulting Commissars when the balloon returned to earth. It is to be hoped that the success, linked with a more normal international relationship, will tend to eliminate the aggressively propagandist apologies which Russian spokesmen and their sympathisers seem to find necessary in order to rid themselves of a feeling of inferiority when in contact with other systems of administration. Correspondence in these columns has lately shown a marked divergence of view regarding the conditions in Russia and, especially, the working of the Five Year Plan. On the book page to-day Lord Marley reviews the recently issued official report of the Soviet Government on that plan. It has been made available by the enterprise of Messrs. Allen and Unwin, the London publishers, whose attention to documentary evidence of modern international thought has been so marked a feature of their publishing policy. Discrepancy of information on Russia is bound to prevail, so long as the country is so much a closed book. Moreover, the very magnitude of the territory covered by the U.S.S.R. makes it probable that material proof can always be found to support any particular theory.

Naturally the official summary endeavours to make the Five Year Plan appear as successful as possible. Lord Marley seems to give the document most respectful consideration—as is fit and proper—but also too easily going an acceptance of its figures, as will be shown in due course. The trial of the British engineers, the information derived with no special propaganda intent and other factors suggest that the figures as well as the rosy deductions concerning the

Plan should be accepted with considerable reserve. With the form of administration set up to guide the Russian people through a period of reconstruction outsiders have no desire to concern themselves, so long as there is no attempt to claim for that system the right of general application in the world at large. A Government, manned in large measure by men untrained in the direction of mighty events, deprived of highly-trained and scientific assistance, mainly by its own peculiar decision to elevate the "proletariat," and working by means of an unashamed tyranny, using the fearsome instruments of murder and terrorism, had to learn by the accumulation of colossal error. The error is still there and the Government is still, presumably learning, although he would be a bold man who would venture exactly to define the stability of the

administration in power. The Five Year Plan has been kept on the rails only by the exercise of the fiercest pressure on the Russian people. It is not too much to say that the destitution, starvation and misery through which the Russian masses are likely to go during the present winter exceed anything in other distressed regions of a distressed world. In fairness it must be recognised that, in spite of their reliance on barbarous methods, the Soviet authorities have been able to inspire a strong missionary zeal which plainly keeps the general morale from collapsing. Hence come, perhaps, the directly contradictory pictures drawn by correspondents who have been contributing to these columns.

The chief charge to be made against Moscow by other nations is this: never in modern history have the nations, nominally at peace, had to incur such heavy expenditure in policing themselves against the activities of propagandist agents of a single country as have the chief Powers of the world been forced to do in face of the operations of the Comintern. Devastation and bloodshed in China tell that tale grimly. The task of assessing Russian achievements is enormously hampered by the fear that occupation in it may, in some way or other, assist that network of world-conspiracy. The violence of the counter-propaganda defeated itself. Intellectuals, out of a sense of proportion slightly awry, rebelled. They refused to recognise the plain facts of the paucity of technical skill and real intellect, as distinct from genius, in Russia as a whole. They delivered themselves up to "personally-conducted tours" in Moscow. Their intentions were

admirable. The results were unfortunate. There came to be a deep gulf between those who went to Russia prepared to admire and those who professed to "see things as they were" but were just as biased in the other direction. The truth, as usual, seems to lie between the two extremes. That is where Lord Marley elects to go astray. It would be interesting to know if his school of thought would be so fertile in excuses, so decorous in language if the subject of examination were, for example, Hitlerist Germany or Fascist Italy. Yesterday the Russian method of disposing of the word "unemployment" was explained in these columns. That supplies appropriate comment on Lord Marley's comfortable assertion that there is "no unemployment" in Russia. For the rest let his handling of statistics be noted. He accepts the statements that in the five years higher education pupils have increased in number from 600,000 to 3,000,000 and elementary pupils from 11,000,000 to 23,000,000. Any educationalist will agree that these figures are preposterous. It is not necessary to consider cost alone, but the actual machinery required to obtain those results. In England when the raising of the school age from 14 to 16 was discussed, it was revealed that to handle the 400,000 additional pupils thus involved would throw a terrific strain on the finances of the local authorities. The provision of the additional accommodation and teaching staffs would demand at least three or four years' notice. Russia is admittedly short of technical experts. Can it be conceived that in five years she could train up sufficient teachers to cope with an additional 12,000,000 elementary school-children and—more absurd still—2,400,000 higher education pupils. It is toward these and similar assertions that the reader has to show the utmost caution in examining Russian claims. Lord Marley would be more convincing if, in his otherwise illuminating review, he had displayed that acutely critical scepticism which he is so ready to apply to the institutions and loyalties of his own country.

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JMS

OCT. 4 1933

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